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ABSTRACT

By helping to concentrate the efforts of all organizational units on institutional goals, by establishing research-based information systems, and by learning to allocate scarce resources efficiently, institutional researchers can offer numerous benefits for the management and operation of 2-year colleges. A comprehensive institutional research program assesses resource allocation, student potential, institutional and student achievement, curricular and program needs and priorities, and the college's impact on the community. In undertaking these activities, the researcher's chief function is to provide data to assist management in arriving at sound decisions. As such, institutional research is a service function, rather than a line management or administrative function. Indeed, by participating in the administrative phase of the planning process, institutional researchers may relinquish their future potential as objective evaluators. Institutional researchers may fulfill their service function by conducting theoretically oriented, long-term institutional studies; providing evaluative information on all aspects of planning; providing predictions, simulations, and models; monitoring the effects of short-range actions on long range goals; and applying management science principles. The paper concludes with brief descriptions of William Rainey Harper College's (Illinois) long-range planning model and Harcum Junior College's (Pennsylvania) institutional research function. A discussion of the advantageous characteristics of small 2-year colleges is appended. (KL)

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INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH & LONG-RANGE PLANNING IN TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

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INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH & LONG-RANGE PLANNING IN TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

When we consider long-range planning vis-a-vis institutional research, we focus upon one of the most basic purposes of such research effort - to help increase managerial effectiveness. If it does not, it can easily degenerate into a costly frill - a 'window dressing' which simply wastes money! Conversely - when such research is competently performed, and the results effectively utilized by management personnel, it can dramatically help reduce costs and improve operations.

By helping to concentrate the efforts of all organizational units upon clearly defined goals and objectives for the institution; by establishing research based information systems; and by learning how to allocate scarce resources in the most efficient manner through the timely implementation of valid models and principles of planning - institutional research can, when applied systematically in a fully effective, (i.e., competent) manner, offer the following potential benefits for the management and operation of the college. (For the purposes of this paper, institutional research is defined simply as self-study by a college designed to improve the institution.)

Potential benefits include:

1- identify and clarify institutional goals and objectives.
2- encourage focus of programs and activities upon goals and objectives, brought about by the pressure to become analytical.
3- improved feelings of participation in decision-making tend to upgrade morale and productivity.
4- planning groups become good funnels for innovative ideas from all areas of the institution.
5- increased probability of identifying potential problems and blind spots before they become excessively disruptive.
6- encourage consideration of long-range goals.
7- likely to encourage an attitude of planning in all areas and levels of the institution.
8- likely to increase program effectiveness and efficiency.
9- tends to create constituency confidence in the operations and procedures of the college.
10- tends to produce personnel satisfactions and confidence by conveying the feeling - "we know where we're going, or at least we're trying systematically to find out".
11- tends to encourage the development of organizational and managerial theory and practice; and
12- likely to encourage the development of new technics of data collection, measurement, and analysis.

In the midst of ever-insistent demands for 'accountability', self-analysis by all organizational organizations has become an urgent necessity. Institutional research and long-range planning, in both community and junior colleges, must take on new dimensions of responsibility. In the collection and analysis of pertinent data, greater emphasis must be placed upon the selective utilization of data gathered which will bring to bear a significant influence upon managerial decision-making. This refocusing of emphasis must contrast with the formerly-focused bland presentation of statistics in support of some theoretical design or hypothesis.

As early as 1971, several junior college institutional research officers met in St. Louis to develop a National Demonstration Project in Institutional Research under the auspices of the League for Innovation in the Junior Colleges. At that time, they agreed that five major components should be an integral part of any comprehensivw IR program. These were to include:

1- assessing the allocation of resources.
2- assessing student potential.
3- assessing achievement, both institutional and of students.
4- analyzing curriculum and program needs and priorities; and
5- assessing the college's impact upon the community.

These researchers developed, in effect, a taxonomy of IR functions under the above-noted five broad categories. For example - major component #1 was further detailed to include the following:

"Basically, this first component would attempt to develop methodologies and data gathering that permit better management decisions. Three basic considerations are subsumed under this component. The first would involve how institutions allocate fiscal resources; the second - how they allocate personnel resources; and the third ....would systematically analyze how they allocate physical resources. Included under the analysis of fiscal resources would be such ...studies as cost benefit analysis, and unit cost analysis relating to plant operations; maintenance; cost per instruction; etc."

Component #3, for example - proposes to assess achievement, relating such achievement to four sub-categories:

1- incoming students characteristics.
2- to instructional methodologies
3- to student expectations; and

4- to institutional climate; i.e., the environmental 'press' and its influence upon students.

Each of the remaining components was carefully spelled out and its result was a manual indicating how to set up various institutional research services. A decade later, the fundamental thrust of this project remains essentially 'relevant'. As Roueche and Boggs succinctly noted in ERIC Junior College Clearinghouse Paper No. 2:

> "An institution of higher learning that stops growing, improving, implementing, and evaluating, is a danger to both society and itself. What right does an institution have to exist when it no longer gives its best (underlining added) in attempting to cope with the increasing complexity of the society it serves?"

And yet, ironically, although IR has produced a wide variety of techniques, tests, equations, accounting procedures, computer applications, etc., it has yet to make a major impact upon the main course of thinking within the two-year college world; why?

We would suggest that the basic reason is 'conservation-lag'. Institutions of higher learning, both two-and-four-year are, basically, quite conservative. The almost religious convictions of many faculty members concerning the presumed superiority of small classes, (traceable, incidently, to 300 A.D. !); the mystique surrounding the faculty-student ratio - a presumed accurate measure of the institution's academic quality; the blind insistence that regular class attendance is necessary; and other time-honored, hoary beliefs too numerous to mention - serve as reminders of the great folklores of the citadels of learning. As Clarr Kerr once suggested - institutions of higher learning, (and I am certain he did not mean to exclude two-year colleges either!) are most conservative about their own affairs while their members are generously liberal about the affairs of others - so long as these did not impact upon them!

Considered in the above-noted framework of observations, what is the role of IR in relation to collegiate long-range planning. First - and foremost - it is to provide data to assist management personnel arrive at sound decisions. As such, it is a staff service function, not a line management, decision-making activity. True, any institutional researcher worth his/her salt must, additionally, be a motivating force within the organization by encouraging and initiating experimentation and research. To be a fully effective staffer , he/she must also carry an assessment or evaluation function as well as the direct contact of research. In short - (s)he must do more than merely stir up trouble! As someone once indicated, he/she must be more than the vice-president in charge of heresy!

Specifically - in the area of log-range planning, he/she must be a good 'team player' - prepared, and willing, to aid the administration; faculty; technical-professional staff; and other service personnel. An effective institutional researcher is a facilitator - a catalyst. However, this must not be misconstrued to mean a line-management decision-maker. He/she is a service aid: he/she may carry but not fire the ammunition!

The institutional researcher is not an administrator. If his/her work is to receive general acceptance, without suspicion, hostility, or resentment, he/she must not act in such a way as to preempt, or even appear to preempt, the prerogatives of the managerial-administrative arms of the college. The rationale for this fundamental distinction appears to be crystal-clear and logically compelling:

1- Line management is held responsible by governing boards for its decisions regarding college operations - not the institutional research office.

2- The institutional researcher offers sound (it better be "sound" !) advice to line management to help it reach pragmatically-sound decisions based, whenevr possible, upon relevant data - not 'armchair analysis' !

3- Since the institutional researcher is not assigned line management decision-making responsibilities regarding college operations, it is eminently illogical to assign management authority for taking such actions to this entirely staff, service, advisory function.

4- Proposing to do so violates a basic management tenet; assign commensurate authority and responsibility within each organizational component.

Realistically assessed, the potential influence of pragmatically-sound IR activities is great. However - this does not mean that college presidents nor faculty committees will be replaced or dimished by IR and long-range planning activities. On the contrary: these functions can only exist when created and nurtured by presidents and faculties. In substance, then - by specifying the boundaries and objectives for the work of the institutional researcher, college, leaders - through their selections - can provide themselves with suitably qualified researchers who can serve, at their pleasure, as valuable means for generating data which help to ease their burden for decision-making.

How best then may IR serve the college executives and managers? Nevitt Sanford claims that what is needed is theoretically-oriented, long-term studies of educational institutions. He believes the institutional research agency should deal in pure research, and should be relatively independent of the host institution. On the other hand, John Dale Russell would like to see institutional research attached directly to the office of the president. It would work toward providing data for decision-making, and be primarily concerned with ways and means for saving money. Personally, it appears that either approach, alone, is essentially a sterile one. Solving immediate problems is an on-going management essential. Pragmatically, problem-oriented research is unquestionably of great practical value to the organization. But - uninformed by theory - over the long haul it goes nowhere. Problem-oriented research, almost by definition, pays little or no attention to the fundamental purposes of the institution or the value system that controls it . However, institutional research that is entirely theoretical in thrust,

may result in theories detached from the institutional realities of everyday existence. It may not be understood nor accepted, and may lose touch with the very real dimension of - "we must reach a sound decision to resolve this problem - now!"

In essence, what is being suggested is that IR, essentially, should be governed by an attitude or approach. Sidney Suslow, apast president of AIR, the Association for Institutional Research, once noted:

> "The successful practice of institutional research depends upon the individual who has a broad knowledge of diverse disciplines; an intense understanding of his institution, and above all, an attitude which commits him to the value of his institution's purpose in society. (This I term 'institutional loyalty', that fragile yet essential personal characteristic or demonstrated behavioral syndrome). The institutional researcher's basic role encompasses the systematic appraisal of the higher education effort. The institutional researcher serves higher education, and in turn his institution, through critical appraisal and careful investigation of its processes and programs."

If, as Suslow suggests, IR is primarily evaluation, what - specifically - is its relationship to long-range planning. It is, in brief, to work closely and cooperatively with those assigned responsibility for planning and policy formulation, for in so doing it helps to achieve the fundamental goal of enhancing academic and administrative-managerial practices. Organizationally, it may even embrace the functional integration of all aspects of planning pertinent to an educational institution; academic matters, student personnel services, physical facilities, finances and other resources, community relations, and institutional development.

Few, if any, would question that the major function of IR is to help achieve maximum results from such long-range planning by offering contributions in the areas of predictions, simulations, and models. If, however, IR is called upon to take an active role in the actual planning deliberations, a word of caution is offered. Some researchers fail to extricate themselves at the proper stage of the planning process. They do not recognize, or choose to ignore, (or possibly their supervisors do!), the serious potential problems associated with 'wearing two

hats; i.e. trying to be both an objective evaluator as well as a committed implementer!

It is unquestionably true that institutional researchers and planners share many common attributes and are equally concerned with the mission of the college. But - unless the researcher stops short of personal participation in the implementation stage of the planning process, he assuredly reliquishes his future potential influence as an objective evaluator. This he replaces by taking on a 'partisan' role along with the management decision-makers. Such a role switch can be very 'unhealthy' for the future acceptance of the institutional researcher within the college.

As Professor Suslow at UCLA noted in years past, an extremely important role that IR can play in the overall planning process is in keeping a weather eye on the possible effects which short-range actions may have on long-range goals. Through its on-going IR evaluations, it should forewarn planners promptly whenever impending short-range activities or decisions may appear to militate against achievement of previously adopted long-range goals. Concomitantly, IR should, whenever possible, also insure that specific objectives and values sought through long-range planning are included in the more limited objectives and values sought in short-range planning.

IR may also involve application of management science principles: systems analysis; records management; computer programming; or numerous other essential, technical functions. However, in its concern with long-range planning and goals formulation, it must not be limited to application of methods or technical expertise, untempered by considerations of educational values. Although such techniques as goal programming; decision models; technological forcasting; and systems analysis are important, developments in psychology, economics, and sociology - to mention but a few of the more obvious disciplines - could be of equal, if not even greater importance.

Quite obviously, no single researcher can embrace all of these technologies, nor is it likely that an Office of Institutional Research could be economically staffed to include them all. This again points to the need for close and cooperative association between faculty, staff, and IR specialists. By free exchange and pooling of expert knowledge, the calibre of the collective IR effort is thus enhanced.

As was previously noted, long-range planning and IR are not identical functions. Planning focuses upon goals and purposes, and the methods for achieving them. It typically requires committee work with philosophical, policy, and quantitative considerations. Collaboratively, IR collects, analyzes, interprets, and reports information. Based upon this distinction, it is often viewed as a resource for planning. Among its several activities, it provides the quantitative data base and interpretations required in the planning process. Hopefully, an established IR activity has available applicable portions of the information required at the time a planning effort is initiated.

Perhaps long-range planning should become the focal point for IR efforts. It may not be too extreme to suggest that the influential IR organizations of the future will be those that are concerned with planning, and constantly test the probable effects of pending decisions.

Citing the highlights from an actual planning model described by John Lucas at the 12th Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research may best illustrate this point. What is described is the long-range plan developed at William Rainey Harper college, a community college in Illinois.

Step 1: The mission, goals, and objectives of the organization are first determined.
Step 2: Exploration of various alternatives to implement objectives.
Step 3: IR is carried out on costs and effects.
Step 4: Evaluation and priority setting takes place.
Step 5: A time schedule of events is designed within the framework of available resources and proposed to the organization.

Step 6: Feedback is received; modifications made; the plan carried out.
Step 7: Finally - a monitoring process is set up to receive information to review progress, and to update the plan.

The committee that was formed to develop the plan was charged to explore the areas of defining the community and students served; the type and mix of services to be offered; the innovations to be undertaken; physical facilities needed; financial structure required.

A decision matrix was developed. It listed all the alternatives to be considered, (vertically), and the criteria by which these alternatives were to be evaluated, (horizontally). This decision matrix then became the outline for the rest of the long-range planning process. Using this guideline, the committee then identified the IR to be undertaken that would provide the information required in the decision matriz to evaluate the various alternatives.

Research areas identified included: surveys of the student body; the faculty, administration and staff personnel; the community. In addition, areas for cost analysis were pinpointed, along with topics to be researched in the literature. A consulting firm carried out population projections for the college district, and from these enrollment projections were derived. Using these enrollment projections, a long-range financial plan was prepared by the business office. Research reports on current students; students who withdrew;alumni, were already available. Legal matters were researched as needed, and upon completion of the research activity, the committee met to evaluate results.

Based upon the committee deliberations, recommendations were made concerning physical expansion; district expansion; financial planning; governance; accountability; academic scheduling and calendars; utilization of faculty resources; program 'mix' and breadth; innovation; grading and retention; internal services.

Finally, the long-range plan calls for a system of monitoring progress made as well as noting yearly input of new information and recommendations by appropriate IR data collection and evaluation. In this way the plan would be updated in a

systematic fashion to avoid becoming date-obsolete.

Recommendations adopted in long-range plans may conveniently be classified as follows:

1- Immediate actions (those actually carried out while the plan was being developed); new retention system; new temporary calendar; creation of a new position which is solely accountable for innovation at the college; establishment of an accountability committee; initiations of a general studies program.

2- Future new actions: purchase a new campus site; include student input in faculty evaluation plan; add honors emphasis to learning laboratory; establish credit by examinations; broaden development work in career program area; establish leadership center; in-service training program; new professional to perform accountability studies.

3- Future expansion: specificenrollment levels desired in specific programs.

4- Contingency goals: financial plan priorities if deficit occurs; expansion of protective action if annexation threatens; new programs to be based on demand.

5- Feasibility and other research studies ordered along with necessary resources required: cultural center; governance evaluation; faculty load package; permanent academic schedule; grading policy; needs of Spanish-speaking population; physical facility specifically designed for adult education; and computer center priorities for systems development.

The above descrition reveals clearly the extent to which timely, well-executed IR may contribute valuable substance to a long-range plan involving major revisions and improvements in the policies and practices of a two-year college.

At Harcum Junior College, a private, independent college for women located in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, a long-range planning pattern has been formally documented biannually, subsequent to institutional research analyses coupled with

faculty and administration deliberations. Basically, these have been projections in the light of existing priorities, and have included at least the five areas of: enrollment; fees; faculty; additional facilities and equipment; sources of funds in addition to those generated by student fees. In short - as an integral part of its total operations, Harcum has actively engaged in an on-going self-evaluation (i.e. institutional research) program and allied long-range planning activities. One goal, a better Harcum, has been the primary objective - a Harcum in which its students might find more and better opportunities to mature and learn.

Although it is axiomatic, it is nonetheless pertinent to emphasize that the staff-service function of IR is either an outright impossibility, or simply a meaningless and costly 'window-dressing', unless it has whole-hearted support of executive management. At Harcum Junior College both the president and the Board of Trustees have vigorously and consistently supported the IR effort. They have encouraged freedom of inquiry; follow-up of research findings; and that most essential dimension - furnishing adequate financial support for the IR function.

An astute educator, Dr. John Nason, a former Swarthmore College president, once observed: A budget is the most important statement of a college's philosophy." The financial support of the IR program must not be left to chance. If the program is considered an essential benefit by executive management, <u>specific</u> provision for its financial 'health' must be assured.

At Harcum, the pragmatic answer to the question; "What is the value of IR in long-range planning?" rests in the firm conviction that it can provide ways and means for identifying and analyzing college problems and priorities. In such recognition, the college takes the first major step toward improving existing programs, practices, and priorities, as well as planning intelligently for the future.

(For those interested, specifically, in the smaller enrollment junior/community college (less than 1,000 students), Appendix 'A' discusses their "advantages".)

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Appendix A

Advantages of Smaller Enrollment Two-Year Colleges

As far back as 1970, the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, in Document 4.60 B; Two-Year Colleges, offered the following cogent comments:

"Ultimately there are only two questions which need to be asked about a two-year college, or any other institution: Has it clearly defined objectives which are appropriate to higher education, and to its potential? Second; how well does it achieve them?

The second question is exceedingly difficult to answer, since the objectives of higher education are deeply concerned with the encouragement of intellectual and personal maturity, which are not amenable to objective measurement or statistical analysis. Nevertheless, one of the primary marks of a competent faculty, administration, and governing board is the persistence and skill with which they seek answers, criticizing and improving their procedures in the light of these findings.

They use tests and measurements, among other means, to discover all that such devices can tell about the progress of their students in the mastery of subject matter, development of skills, logical precision, and ability to apply knowledge. They test student achievement in general, as well as specialized areas of the curriculum, on an inclusive as well as course by course basis, and when possible, in comparison with student achievement elsewhere.

They make frequent appraisals of their graduates in education beyond the two-year college level. They survey alumni opinions. They solicit confidential reports from employers. They do not wholly trust any indicies, but they dearch and weigh them all for evidence of progress or success.

Something can be learned through close observation of student conduct. How responsible and constructive is student participation in their own government? What attitudes and maturity of interests do the students exhibit in their activities and in their response to cultural, civic, and professional opportunities? Do their interets change while they are in college? What can be discerned about their attitudes toward social values? What are the characteristics of their social life? Do they show increasing interest in scholarship and/or proficiency as they get deeper into their subjects?"

The above comments by the Commission directs attention to the extremely important dimension of Educational self-renewal which, in the words of former U.S.Commissioner of Education James Allen, seeks ...."to change attitudes, to throw off inhibiting tradition, and to be willing to experiment and explore new methods and directions" - in a word, to adapt to change! (NB - note well; such educational self-renewal is, in good measure, accomplished through effective long-range planning.

Probably the most significant advantage of a smaller college is its ability, because of its smallness, to decide upon a single set of institutional objectives, and build a total enrollment which promotes these objectives through every facet of a student's life. It is abundantly clear that the student learning which takes place on a college campus is the result of much more than simply the classroom-laboratory experiences. The out-of-class, or collateral, learning experiences are equally important to the growth and maturation of the student. They contribute in and of themselves as learning experiences. Additionally, these have an effect upon the student's receptivity to, and use of, his classroom-laboratory experiences. In general, it is the small college in which the toal college community understand and work for a common set of objectives. It is the small college in which the opportunity exists to create a controlled environment which can deeply affect the students and faculty alike.

In most small colleges the key to quality; the key to financial solvency; the key to faculty improvement; the key to educational 'success'; i.e. environmental 'press' impact upon the students, is to be found in the structure of the curriculum and the relationship of the curriculum to the institution's overall educational objectives. Although there are graduations in between, the curriculum tends to approximate one of two types:

1- the large and miscellaneous assortment of courses that have been added to the curriculum for a wide variety of generally unrelated and ill-defined reasons. This type of curriculum is like spilt milk; it spreads in all directions until it is too thin to run anymore. Unfortunately, like spilt milk, it is tragically wasteful and leads to more slipping and sliding than to sustenance!

2- this second type has a severely limited, but well-planned, set of courses. These have been chosen because of their direct relationship to the institution's

principal objective(s). They can be well taught because the faculty teach a limited number of courses, and therefore have time to prepare thoroughly for each one. At least in theory, the faculty members can be better qualified, because they better understand the central purposes of the college. Faculty members also can be better paid in such institutions because the faculty salary monies have been utilized to secure a smaller number of better-paid teachers. By careful planning and delimiting its course offerings, the college has conserved its resources in terms of money; faculty energy; student time, so that it is able to constantly improve the courses it offers. Additionally, it may also make a substantial investment in those out-of-class activities which also contribute, often substantially, to the educational effectiveness of the college.

A deliberately restricted curriculum makes one further contribution to the effectiveness of a small college. It causes the faculty and the administration to pay close attention to course selection and course content, and thereby forces the institution to carefully define its objectives. This is true because arguments over course selection and course content inevitably resolve themselves into arguments over the educational objectives which these courses are designed to promote. And, intangible as it may be, nothing contributes to the achievements of a college quite so much as a clear understanding on the part of the faculty, administration, and students , of the college's principal educational goals.

A prescription then for excellence in a small college might be written somewhat as follows:

1- the institution must identify its objectives clearly, and carefully delimit them. In terms of logical sequence, this identification process should come first, but in terms of the realities of human interaction, it is more likely that the objectives to which the faculty is willing to commit itself seriously will merge as faculty and administration work through such difficult and crucial

problems as the elimination of courses; the revision of course content; the revitalization of classroom-laboratory instruction. If such activities are undertaken periodically only, as it were on a 'crisis' basis, they can be severely traumatic. Even in colleges where curriculum review is a continuous process, they remain mildly traumatic. However, this very trauma also serves the purpose of keeping every concerned member of the college community sharply aware of them, and of their importance.

2- a surprizing number of research studies are available which deal with small and medium-sized colleges. Not all of these are IR studies, by any means, however - many of them are valuable to the IR officer because they provide either information; ideas; or both. A related source of studies dealing with small colleges is the large and still growing literature about community/junior colleges, some of which now deals specifically with IR relations to the two-year college. The usefulness of such literature should not be overlooked, for it is absurd and wasteful to 'reinvent the wheel' as it were, when a literature search may reveal data and results already 'invented' !!

3- more often than not, the institutional researcher in a small college needs help. Frequently his IR assignment is part-time, and almost by definition, his experience in IR is limited to precisely whatever he has been able to do in his current job. A valuable source of assistance for such researchers are the exchange of information and ideas which takes place at professional meetings; workshops; membership in professional associations. IR studies which are conducted through the cooperative efforts of small groups of small-enrollment colleges also offer a number of important advantages - the most important being the extended scope of the collective research effort and the shared results which furnish data beyond the staffing capabilities of the individual colleges concerned. Such exchange of 'know-how', and the sharpening of concepts and procedures, makes possible a quality of research which would be unlikely if each institution had to rely

onlyupon the efforts of one, often part-time, individual.

I would, in the final analysis, compare IR to a stethescope: it permits one to 'listen in' on the 'vital organs' of the college. Although it is true that no one can take the ultimate weight of decision-making from the shoulders of management personnel, the more they know about how things <u>really are</u>. the lighter the burden can be! In short - to avoid the twin pitfalls of complacency and misdirection, on-going institutional self-study, coupled with long-range planning, are management necessities to help insure optimal operations.

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